

Building partnerships



**citizens
advice**

Southwark Consumer
Empowerment Partnership
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Our year as a CEP

Citizens Advice Southwark is the Consumer Empowerment Partnership providing support and advice to the network on working with partners to improve policy for our clients.

Over the past year we have been working on producing this guide with templates and tools for the network to use to help in partnership working. We have also shared good practice and examples of effective partnership working across the network.

My brief has been to advocate for clients locally on consumer issues while helping the network to build relationships with other organisations to work in partnership. We have been involved in a number of local and national projects in the past year.

In the spring, we held an anti-loan sharks event in partnership with the Illegal Money Lending Team and the Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations to provide information on the problems of illegal money lending and what help is available for the residents of Southwark.

During scams awareness month we worked with the Southwark Trading Standards team throughout the month to promote the message and raise awareness of scams. We did a social media campaign where we tweeted regularly about the issues and also blogged about it. We also had an article in Southwark life magazine, which goes to all residential properties in the borough. As part of the work with Trading Standards we held a joint training event for other organisations and community activists to provide information on scams and where people can go for help.

We held a day-long awareness-raising training session with Campaigns Officer Sue Christoforou at Citizens Advice in July for London offices. This looked at identifying issues, research and campaign techniques. We also introduced attendees to different people at Citizens Advice that can help with the campaigning process.

For Big Energy Saving week 2015 we held an event with other local organisations (including AgeUK Southwark and Lewisham, and Southwark Carers) to provide information, advice and switching help to the residents of Southwark. We were able to help people on the day as well as providing further support if necessary. We also used tweeted during this week and blogged about fuel poverty issues.

We have attended regular housing forums with other advice and support organisations in Southwark to keep updated on the developments in the sector, as well as letting others know about the Citizens Advice campaign. On the 1st November, Southwark council introduced additional and selective licensing for private landlords in the borough. This dramatically expands the number of landlords requiring a license. We have been working with the housing enforcement department to help inform our clients of the scheme and what it will mean for them.

This is just part of what Citizens Advice Southwark has been doing as a CEP over the past year.

We have produced this guide to encourage local Citizens Advice to campaign in partnership to help clients where there are shared issues of interest between our organisation and those in Government or the private sector. If you haven't campaigned in partnership before, this guide will help you to figure out where to begin, with tips on approaching partners, a guide to stakeholder mapping, and a look at innovative ways to campaign. This guide will introduce you to a number of concepts and ideas to support you in your campaign work, and show how easy it is to campaign in partnership.

Jenny McGregor

Consumer Empowerment Coordinator
Citizens Advice Southwark

Tips for approaching potential campaign partners

There are many instances when it may be desirable or necessary to work in partnership with other organisations, group or individuals. Partnership working can help develop ideas, allow you to share knowledge and skills, increase capacity, provide expertise, and let you reach targets or new audiences.

Some examples of partnership working include:

External events – Working with others to put on external facing events. For example working with your local Trading Standards department during Scams Awareness Month to provide workshops or awareness raising events for the public or other groups.

Partnership Research – Working with other organisations to share resources when conducting research. For example, working with a local refugee and migrant organisation whilst researching the experiences of refugees accessing statutory services.

Campaigning in Partnership – Working with other organisations to jointly deliver a campaign. For example, working with Housing departments in your local council to strengthen consumer rights for private renters.

Tips

- Before approaching potential partners, think about any of your existing partners that may already be working with them. It may be easier to approach them through someone you already know
- Consider the common ground you share with other organisations, agencies or individuals, use this as a way of approaching them.
- There can be many benefits to networking with people at events or meetings, you can meet people from many different areas that may be able to support your campaigning work in the future.

- Look at what potential partners are doing – you may find an ‘in’ with potential partners through things they have already produced or are working on, even if it isn’t necessarily relevant to your current issue.
- It is important to be clear about the aim of the partnership and what people’s roles will be.
- Do you need a partnership agreement? This is a good idea if you are applying for funding. The agreement should cover a commitment to share information of any funding bids relevant to the partnership and clarify roles and areas of responsibility.
- There is nothing wrong with competition. At some point several partners might be applying for the same funding but if information is shared then duplication can be avoided.
- Don’t wait for a funding or campaign opportunity before contacting people. Think long term about the aims and priorities of your organisation. For example, if you have identified a need to deal with fuel poverty then develop a partnership for a sound base for future funding opportunities.



Citizens Advice Southwark works closely with Southwark Trading Standards when campaigning on consumer issues, particularly during scams awareness month. In July 2015 we jointly held a workshop for local community activists and advice organisations which focused on how we could help victims of scams within the borough. Working with Trading Standards allowed us to reach a wide audience to raise awareness about consumer protections from scams. We also worked on a number of social media based awareness raising activities during the month, such as tweeting and Trading Standards writing a guest post for our blog.



Citizens Advice Southwark has campaigned with the Illegal Money Lending Team on a number of occasions. We have worked together on workshops and community events to raise awareness of illegal money lending, as well as spreading the anti-loan shark message through social media. The expertise of the Illegal Money Lending Team and our wide network of contacts allows us to reach a large number of people to help them avoid loan sharks and get help if they need it.

Working in partnership brings so many opportunities for identifying issues and developing services to meet this need. Effective joint working and referral helps to reach people who might never have thought to access advice services. Partnership helps share learning and good practice and presents a joined up approach to funders.

Sally Causer, Director
Southwark Law Centre

Further guidance

There is further guidance available on the BMIS, search for 'Partnerships overview'

Why work in partnership?

Working in partnership can be beneficial for a number of reasons, allowing organisations to achieve things they would not easily be able to do by themselves.

Share expertise, experience, and essential insights

The partners you chose to work with may have different expertise or experience than you and your organisation. This can help provide essential insights into unfamiliar areas or processes. Your partners may also be able to share knowledge with you regarding the topic you are working on.

[Case study]

Citizens Advice Southwark is the lead on a financial capability project called Money Savvy Southwark and works with Southwark Law Centre and a number of other local advice organisations. Each of the partners has different experience or expertise and can share insights into unfamiliar areas. For example, the Law Centre is able to provide the partners with legal expertise on various issues relating to managing money which they would otherwise not have, whilst Citizens Advice Southwark can help with regards to the benefits that come from being part of a large, national organisation. Some other partners can reach particular audiences, whereas others can provide particular resources. Southwark Law Centre also shares our office space, This allows the partnership advantages that the individual organisations wouldn't have alone as it has a wider reach and access to more resources.

Increase productivity, efficiency and capacity

Working in partnership can allow an organisation to increase capacity, productivity and efficiency by allowing the workload to be spread out amongst those best suited to the task. Having partners with different expertise allows you to work more efficiently as those who are best placed to deal with something can handle it, which can increase productivity.



Reach a wider/new audience

Partnership working may allow you to reach a wider audience as you will be able to use the existing clients, customers or contacts of both the partner organisations and your own. Your partners may have contacts you would not be able to reach otherwise, or would not have thought about as an audience. For example, the Money Savvy Southwark partners connections with different sections of the community, allowing the project to target a wider range of people, such as new council tenants, those in temporary accommodation, and young people.

Partners can provide new ideas, highlight different issues and potential problems/solutions, can help with creativity

The different experiences and expertise that your partners have had can allow them to provide you with new ideas and ways of looking at problems. This can result in innovative ways to approach these problems, finding new solutions and creative ways of doing so.

Share resources and responsibility

When working in partnership, the different partner organisations can take on different aspects of the work, sharing responsibility for the end product. This also allows the partners to have access to resources they wouldn't have had otherwise.

New opportunities

Working in partnership can open up new opportunities for the organisations involved, such as having access to new resources, or meeting and working with new politicians and influencers, which will give you a greater voice on behalf of your clients and other consumers.

Working in partnership can provide benefits of scale

Large organisations can benefit from the expertise of smaller organisations, while small organisations can benefit from the reach, profile and capacity of large organisations.

What can go wrong in a partnership?

What to do when a partnership goes wrong

While working in a partnership can have many advantages, there is always the chance that something could go wrong. However, there are often things that can be done to help if this happens. In order to know how best to act when a partnership goes wrong, it is necessary to figure out, what exactly has happened.

Some common things that can make partnership working difficult include:

- **Disagreements** – Partners can have disagreements on many different points. This may be caused by a number of factors, such as difference in working style or changing priorities. For example, partners can disagree about how to do something or which aspect of the partnership's goals is most important.
- **Misunderstandings** – There is much that can be misunderstood when working in partnership. For example, partners can misunderstand each other, the nature of the partnership, or the aims and goals of the partnership.
- **Mistakes** – Again, these can vary from inconsequential to more significant. For example, if one partner puts out a press release about a project without the agreement of the other partner.
- **Lack of adequate communication**
 - Partnerships work best when all involved know how best to communicate with each other, and feel able to do so.
- **Poor evaluation mechanisms** – This is important for knowing how well the partnership is going. Not being able to evaluate the work you are doing can lead to staleness or goals not being achieved.

What to do when things go wrong

If the partnership does not work out as hoped there are a number of things that can be done to resolve differences.

Review how you communicate

Good partnerships rely on good communication, and any breakdown in this can be problematic. Good communication can help resolve disagreements and misunderstandings. It may be necessary to look again at the way in which the partners communicate with each other. In particular reviewing channels for feedback, who has the responsibility for communicating what, and schedules of meetings. With these things reviewed, clarified and agreed upon, the partnership may be able to move forward.

Review responsibilities

It may be the case that each partner has different responsibilities in the relationship. If it feels that the workload is unbalanced or that one partner has insufficient resources, it could be necessary to look again at the allocated responsibilities. Who is doing what? Are they the best person or organisation for the job? An honest discussion of these questions can help resolve issues of responsibility. It is also important to feel able to raise any issues if it seems like a partner is struggling or if the resources are no longer available to allow a partner to continue as they were.

Review goals

Misunderstandings and disagreements are just two of the issues that can arise with regards to the goals of a partnership. As the partnership develops, goals can change along with it, meaning that it may be necessary to look again at what was decided at the beginning. The goals of the partnership need to be beneficial to all partners, as well as measurable and realistic.

Look at your partnership agreement, review it

If you signed a partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding before going into partnership with another organisation, look over the document. Is there something in particular that needs to be clarified? It may be that the agreement needs to be revised. It may be a good idea to check the purpose of the partnership, what is expected in terms of resources and responsibilities, the conditions of the partnership and the guidelines for decision making. A sample Memorandum of Understanding and Partnership Agreement [can be found on BMIS](#).

End the partnership and move on.

Sometimes it will be best to end the partnership. This may be due to a mismatch of values, changes within an organisation that mean they can no longer commit to the relationship, or that none of the previous steps have helped. It is important to remain cooperative and polite when ending a partnership early, trying to overcome any animosity or resentment. There will be a number of loose ends that need to be tied up such as resources or funds, and the end must be properly managed by both partners. It is also important to review the partnership to find out what went wrong in order to learn from the partnership and avoid the mistakes made in any future partnership working.

Analysing your stakeholders

This section of the guide will help you identify the key local decision makers and other influencers that will be able to assist you in your campaigning work. Knowing your stakeholders will allow you to build partnerships with the people best suited to your campaign aims, and can also be beneficial when securing resources and support for your office.

Make a list

The first step is to make a list of all the key stakeholders, working groups, and networks which have influence over or interest in your work or your clients. For example, local councillors, local MPs, Trading Standards, and local authority officers.

Map the stakeholders

Next, you should map the stakeholders according to their influence and interest. Look at their influence and interest in the clients and the clients' needs. Consider how engaged they are with your office and how much contact you have. Think about whether they are a key decision maker over local services or practices, or whether they have influence over those decision makers. A sample stakeholder map can be found on BMIS.

Identify the key stakeholders

Pinpoint the most influential stakeholders and consider your current relationship with them. If it is not currently strong, make this a priority.

Look at the strength of your relationships

Consider your relationships with all the stakeholders you have identified and label them as strong, medium, or weak.

Look at how to improve your relationships

There are a number of things to consider here:

- What are motivations and interests of the stakeholders? Local authority officers need to meet council priorities, MPs like to be seen to be engaging with their constituents.
- What are the main issues you want to influence and how can you best show evidence from your clients on these issues?
- Can a stakeholder with a high interest in your office attend a meeting or event?
- Could you meet a stakeholder with a low degree of interest at another event?
- How will you maintain contact?
- How can you prioritise time and resources to the more influential stakeholders?



An innovative approach to campaigning

Citizens Advice Southwark has been using theatre performances to aid awareness raising campaigns in a number of ways.

The Illegal Money Lending Team has a script available for organisations to use to stage their own performances. This focuses on the story of a young woman who borrows money from a loan shark in order to replace a broken washing machine. Citizens Advice Southwark used this script to put on a performance starring staff and volunteers at an illegal money lending event held at a local tenants and residents' association.

The Stop Loan Sharks event featured speakers from local organisations including Citizens Advice Southwark, the credit union, and the chair of the Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations. The event was attended by local residents and representatives from other organisations in the borough.

The play was very well received by those attending, with many saying that it really helped to get the message across and to show the true horrors of borrowing from an illegal money lender.

Following on from the success of the Stop Loan Sharks event, we decided to use theatre in another public event, this time working with a local theatre company that we had previously used for the London launch of Big Energy Saving Week.

We have found that using theatre performance as part of awareness raising campaigns has been an innovative and well received way of spreading the message and getting the public involved with campaigns. There is scope to use this method for a variety of topics and in a number of different settings, which is something we would like to further explore.

I found the play very enjoyable and an interesting way to approach the issues. I feel more confident in how to get help now if I need it.

Steph

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